

## Streets at Southpoint and GoTriangle clash over reserved park-and-ride spaces

The Herald-Sun By Zachery Eanes June 8, 2017

DURHAM – A dispute has emerged between The Streets at Southpoint and the public transit agency GoTriangle over the use of the mall's parking lot spaces by GoTriangle park-and-ride customers.

GoTriangle warned customers Wednesday that mall management had said the park-and-ride spaces may only be used from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday – and that violators would be towed.

GoTriangle said the notice violates the mall's agreement with the City of Durham, which requires Southpoint to mark designated spaces and place signs that clearly indicate parking restrictions.

The agency doesn't believe the mall has clearly marked where the park-and-ride spaces are and has not placed any signs that note time limits. (There is a sign in the parking lot that indicates the general park-and-ride area, but individual spaces are not marked.)

The Streets at Southpoint did not immediately return a request for comment.

Under an amended agreement with the city in 2008, the mall must provide 147 park-and-ride spaces as well as signs designating which spaces are reserved for park-and-ride customers during weekdays from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

An email from Patrick O. Young, the director of the Durham City-County Planning Department, sent to the Durham City Council and the Durham County commissioners on Thursday indicates the mall would be in violation if it enforced time limits on the spaces.

The mall would be allowed to enforce limitations only after installing correct signage, Young wrote.

Additionally, a representative from the mall had recently expressed interest in reducing the number of reserved spaces from 147 to 100, Young said.

"This is permissible under the UDO (Unified Development Ordinance), but would be considered a significant deviation from the Zoning Approval, necessitating a new site plan," Young wrote.

At a Durham City Council work session on Thursday, Durham Mayor Bill Bell said he thought Southpoint officials handled the situation "poorly."

"I just think it was really poor public relations on the part of the mall to proceed in the direction they did," Bell said. "The state the mall is in today, you'd think you'd want as many people as possible to be able to come there."

City Councilman Charlie Reece added that he would like to revisit the 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. time restrictions in the future.

"It puts folks at a disadvantage who work alternative hours," he said. "Some of the working folks who are taking public transit typically work at least one job outside the 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. timeframe."

Windshield notices

Mike Charbonneau, director of marketing and communications for GoTriangle, said the agency has not heard directly from The Streets at Southpoint since notices began to be distributed on windshields.

"One of our remaining questions is that we don't know how Southpoint management is going to determine who is a park-and-ride customer and who is a mall customer before they tow," Charbonneau said.

"They haven't explained how people who might get off of a bus after 6 p.m. or a customer who goes to the mall after they get off a bus instead of going straight to their car would be treated," he said.

Charbonneau said The Streets at Southpoint park-and-ride location is one of transit agency's most popular locations for parking, though an average number of daily users at the location was unknown.

There are more park-and-ride spaces located nearby at the Renaissance Village shopping center in front of the Home Goods store along Renaissance Parkway. It has 67 reserved spaces.

Charbonneau added that the city's response reinforced GoTriangle's belief that the Streets at Southpoint was behaving unfairly.

"The city confirmed what we believed yesterday – that it was unfair and a violation of the agreement with the city," he said.

*Staff writer Virginia Bridges contributed to this story.*

## **Durham mall threatens to tow GoTriangle park-and-ride customers**

WRAL.com By Janine Bowen June 7, 2017

DURHAM, N.C. — A parking controversy is brewing between park-and-ride transit customers and the Streets at Southpoint Mall in Durham.

GoTriangle said mall managers are threatening to tow park-and-ride patrons.

Park-and-ride customers said mall security placed fliers on their vehicles twice this week with notices stating they can only park in the lot between the hours of 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Go Triangle spokesman Michael Charbonneau said he is concerned about the mall's actions.

"We were very concerned to learn that Southpoint Mall was threatening to tow transit customers who were parking in what should be a designated park-and-ride lot to access a bus to get to work, school or a doctor's office," Charbonneau said. "We believe that threatening to do this without any clearly marked spaces or signs indicating any time restrictions is unfair to customers and violates the agreement the mall has with the City of Durham."

Durham City Manager Tom Bonfield said it is his understanding that the mall's tow notice only pertained to park-and-ride patrons who were not parking in designated areas.

GoTriangle said in a press release that while a sign in the Southpoint Mall parking lot indicates the general park-and-ride area, there are no designated spaces marked within the lot and no time restrictions are posted.

GoTriangle said that Southpoint management has not indicated how it will determine if a vehicle belongs to a transit customer or shopper before towing it and has not explained how it will work with transit customers who return on a bus that arrives after 6 p.m. or who enter the mall after getting off the bus.

WRAL News reached out to the general manager at Southpoint, but has not received a response.

## At select employers, Triangle workers are paid not to drive

The News and Observer By John Murawski June 8, 2017

When Ted FitzGerald settles in for his morning commute by bus from Raleigh to Durham, he becomes the model enlightened commuter that Triangle transportation advocates see as the region's future. Three days a week, FitzGerald cruises 25-miles each way on a bus equipped with Wi-Fi service, his movable office away from the office.

FitzGerald estimates that taking the bus saves him between \$1,000 and \$1,500 a year on gasoline. In the process, he removes one car from Interstate 40, clears up a free parking space in Durham and doesn't contribute a particle of pollution to the region's air quality.

"It's so much more productive for me," said FitzGerald, 49, a director of global research services for FHI 360, an international nonprofit organization. "I avoid the frustration of dealing with traffic."

But ask FitzGerald a few questions about the logistics of his commute, and it's not very hard to see why commuters like him remain relatively rare here. His GoTriangle bus stop is within walking distance of his home, and the bus drops him off just 1 1/2 blocks away from his office on the American Tobacco Campus. His monthly bus pass – worth \$102 – is free, courtesy of FHI 360's landlord, to ease demand for limited parking spaces.

A number of Triangle companies like FHI 360 are consistently ranked nationally for offering generous commuting benefits. The perks amount to free money, and include bus passes and subsidies for bicycling or van pooling. Such employers typically offer a free taxi ride or rental car for nondriving employees who need an emergency ride home. At RTI International, a nonprofit in Research Triangle Park, cyclists get an on-site bike repair facility in addition to a \$240 annual subsidy for pedaling to the office.

Competitive commuting perks qualified 18 Triangle businesses and organization this year for inclusion among the nation's 231 Best Workplaces for Commuters, a voluntary program run by the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida in Tampa. The program was started in 2002 by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Transportation to showcase employers that are not exclusively staffed by solo drivers.

Local companies and governments embraced the concept to ease congestion on the Triangle's highways and to improve air quality, which for years was below federal standards. RTP employers that regularly made the list included the EPA itself and Cisco Systems, as well as local governments and universities. To qualify, employers must show that at least 14 percent of their workforce is not driving alone to work, and they must offer incentives to encourage workers not to drive.

A reverse take on commuting broke into the news last month when global technology giant IBM curtailed its longstanding work-from-home perk. IBM, which is on the 2017 list of Best Workplaces for Commuters, declined to describe its commuting benefits for this story.

For the companies that do promote alternative commuting options, such benefits can produce impressive results. At Red Hat, the downtown Raleigh software company, 25 percent of employees work from home. At Citrix, another downtown Raleigh software company, nearly 22 percent are teleworkers. And at FHI 360, more than half the employees either work at home, bike to work or ride the bus on a regular basis at least once a week.

For most Triangle residents, however, driving to work remains the most practical option, year after year. In Durham County, the percentage of commuters who drive alone hasn't budged from 74 percent in a decade, U.S. Census surveys show. In Wake County, the percentage of commuters who drive to work alone is higher – fluctuating between 79 percent and 81 percent.

Triangle transportation advocates say that in one of the fastest-growing and decentralized regions in the country, there's a chronic shortage of alternatives to driving. Voters apparently agree: Wake, Durham and Orange counties

have approved transit referendums raising the county sales tax for transit spending. In Wake's case, the tax increase is expected to triple bus service and help develop commuter rail.

"We know many people work in one county but travel to another [county] for work, school, doctor's appointments or other important places," said GoTriangle spokesman Mike Charbonneau. "It is significant to note that Wake, Durham and Orange County voters all approved referendums. ... It also speaks volumes about our residents who recognize the need for more transit options and understand the correlation between better transit connections and greater opportunities for all, as well as the investment in a greater quality of life in the region."

Some statistics show a reduced reliance on driving, but it would be wrong to assume it's all due to progressive commuting policies, noted Philip Winters, director of the Transportation Demand Management Program at the Center for Urban Transportation Research in Tampa. One example: a gradual increase in the past decade of people who work from home in Wake and Durham counties. The work-at-home rise can be partly attributed to technological improvements and flexible employers.

But Winters said some home-based workers are running a side business, not high-end teleworkers who choose not to drive to the office. Likewise, 32 percent of GoTriangle bus riders don't own a car.

Employers say they offer these perks to attract and retain talented workers who want to work for flexible and accommodating organizations. Such employers promote sustainability as part of their corporate culture. The fewer who people drive to the office, the fewer parking spaces have to be provided on company property. And some of the transit subsidies for workers [can be written off](#), saving employers on payroll-related taxes.

"Our open culture lends itself to people working where they are most comfortable and most productive," said Red Hat spokeswoman Allison Showalter.

FitzGerald has got his commute down to a science. He uses the GoTriangle app to track the bus's location so he doesn't waste time waiting. He uses the free onboard Wi-Fi to plan for meetings and check email.

He's been commuting by bus for nearly 20 years and has used the free emergency ride home service just three times, "mostly when I stayed late at work."

Steven Goldsmith, an internal communications specialist at Red Hat, has been taking the bus four days a week since he joined Red Hat last year. Goldsmith, who lives in northern Raleigh, does have to drive 5 miles to pick up the bus, but he would drive that way anyway, so it's not out of his way. Riding the bus adds 5 to 10 minutes to his 13-mile commute.

"But what you gain is a whole lot of stuff," he said "I can work. I can read."

He also uses a free \$102 bus pass, contributed by his employer, and estimates he saves \$50 a month on gasoline.

"Because I don't have to worry about driving, I can be more productive on the bus," he said. "And I'm a lot less stressed out on either end of the journey."

## **RDU to trail cyclists: Stop trespassing**

Triangle Business Journal By Lauren K. Ohnesorge June 9, 2017

As conversations over land use continue with outdoor groups, Raleigh-Durham International Airport wants cyclists off its property along Old Reedy Creek Road.

The airport released a statement Thursday: "Airport property along Old Reedy Creek Road, which is clearly marked 'no trespassing,' is being accessed illegally by trail bikers."

The statement asks groups and individuals to refrain from "building trails and accessing this land illegally." An airport spokesman said RDU has not taken any legal action against cyclists, and is, "at this point" just working to educate the community about the no trespassing designation.

Jean Spooner, chairwoman of the Umstead Coalition, says the timing of RDU's notice is "curious."

The trails in question have been used for decades by hikers, joggers and cyclists without enforcement. On sunny Saturdays, it's not abnormal to see lines of cars parked along Reedy Creek Road for the makeshift trails. And a look at a "heat map" on activity tracker Strava shows orange lines along the acreage, indicating common use by users of the app.

Even so, Dave Anderson, spokesman for Triangle Off-Road Cyclists (TORC), says neither group has encouraged the use of those trails.

"TORC has managed the trail network at Lake Crabtree County Park and we do not encourage illegal trails," he says. "We do recognize the significant demand for centralized, convenient trail-based recreation, so our goal ... is to bring the right partners together for a solution that meets RDU's financial needs and preserves this amazing asset for the Triangle."

He says his group is trying to do it the right way – through conversations with the RDU Airport Authority and government officials.

Still, RDU spokesman Andrew Sawyer says that, in February, the airport gave groups a June 30 deadline to come up with alternative land-use proposals. Sawyer says a proposal has yet to be delivered.

Both Anderson and Spooner say they're aware of the "ultimatum" and are working on a response. They've even commissioned local landscape architect Susan Hatchell to help with designs for the tract, and Florida firm EDSA is lending its services.

Spooner hopes to see a mixed-use urban trail center on the tract. But finding commercial partners has been a challenge, as RDU has not granted permission to do appraisals of the property, she says.

"It is a challenge for us to have firm financial commitments if we cannot assess the property," she says.

Rex Schaberg, a retired economist and professor at N.C. State University, is among those lending his expertise. Schabert, a hobby cyclist, presented some of his ideas to the airport last fall – including bringing in a recreational mixed-use resort.

He's not sure if the June 30 deadline is fair, as Wake County has commissioned its own economics study on the use of the land – the findings of which have yet to be presented.

"It would be everybody's hope that they find economic drivers, and we could incorporate that into what we're putting together," he says.

RDU acquired the land under an agreement that it be used for a "direct aviation purpose."

As it's not suitable for the runway additions and revamps, they have repeatedly said that the "direct" benefit will be a financial one, with the land leased for development.

## Hikers, cyclists pushing for urban trails center called RDU Forest

The Herald-Sun By Kathryn Trogdon June 10, 2017

MORRISVILLE – Hikers, cyclists and other outdoor enthusiasts continue to push for an expansive system of trails and supporting businesses on Raleigh-Durham International Airport land and have officially branded their vision “RDU Forest.”

Supporters want more than 600 acres between Lake Crabtree County Park and William B. Umstead State Park to one day feel more like a resort, with brew pubs, outdoor stores, bike rentals, rope courses, zip lines and places to hold small meetings or conventions, as well as more than 50 miles of trails.

“All of that adds up to some level of leasable revenue for the airport, and it would give the Triangle the ability to preserve that green space and have that kind of destination there,” said Chaz Felix, a Raleigh resident and member of Triangle Off-Road Cyclists. TORC and The Umstead Coalition are two of the main nonprofits behind the RDU Forest effort.

Felix was one of about 100 people who attended a meeting Thursday to support or learn more about the [urban trails center concept](#). More than 7,000 [supporters](#) have signed an [online petition](#) asking the airport authority to preserve forested land and existing recreational trails to be used for the project.

The idea for the urban trails center came in response to RDU’s [25-year master planning process](#). The master plan, which the airport authority approved in October, lays out potential development of the airport’s core and surrounding land, including a potential hotel or office park, quarry and parking on the land the activists are eying for RDU Forest.

“This is an opportunity to better understand the current proposal for a quarry and parking right up to Umstead State Park and Crabtree Creek and share with them our alternative vision that we think should be seriously considered,” said Jean Spooner, chair of The Umstead Coalition.

### Project feasibility

Thursday’s meeting comes at a time when Wake County is [studying the feasibility](#) of an urban trails center on the land. The study is expected to determine whether the project would make money, and if so, how much land would be needed.

Most of the land is owned by the airport, and Wake likely would have to lease property at fair-market value to make the center possible. The RDU airport authority is required to adhere to Federal Aviation Administration obligations to receive federal funding and must get FAA approval to develop or lease property, particularly if it is to allow a use that is not essential to airport operations.

Spooner said once the outcome of the study is released, the RDU Forest working group will submit an updated plan to the airport.

There already are miles of hiking and biking trails at Lake Crabtree County Park, as well as trails on adjacent land along Old Reedy Creek Road. But RDU officials said Thursday that the land along Old Reedy Creek Road is not public and is lined with “No Trespassing” signs.

[\[RDU: Bikers illegally using airport land\]](#)

Felix said the RDU Forest group is not advocating for people to use the land along Old Reedy Creek Road, but it still has the potential to one day be a part of the urban trails center.

“The bones are there,” he said.

## Alternatives

Of all the elements in the RDU master plan, supporters of the trail project said they are most concerned about the potential quarry that is listed as a possible use for land south of Umstead State Park.

"We feel that a new quarry pit on the most sensitive piece of property next to Crabtree Creek takes away our options," Spooner said.

Developing airport land could help pay for hundreds of millions of dollars in expenses RDU expects to face in the coming years as it replaces runways and taxiways, builds a consolidated rental car facility and makes other improvements. Airport officials expect to have to rebuild the longest runway in the next three to five years.

"We have flexibility when it comes to the land-use component as long as it meets the acceptable criteria for airport land use," RDU spokesman Andrew Sawyer said. "Nothing is set in stone yet. Our priority right now is really, really laser-focused on that runway project."

Morrisville Mayor Mark Stohlman, an 18-year trail user, was involved in a previous effort to preserve the trails at Lake Crabtree County Park called "Save the Crab." Now he supports the effort to preserve even more land for expanded trails but said he was disappointed with the outcome of the airport's master planning process.

"There's a tremendous disconnect between the public input and the result we received from RDU, but I am still hopeful that they will work toward a compromise," he said. "To me, the answer is there. It's just a matter of the fortitude of the RDU authority board to recognize it, to kind of buy into it and start promoting it and developing it."

## RDU to receive state funding for runway

The Herald-Sun By Kathryn Trogdon June 21, 2017

MORRISVILLE – Raleigh-Durham International Airport would receive more than \$50 million over the next two years for a much-needed runway replacement under the House and Senate's compromise budget proposal.

The budget released this week includes \$115 million for [capital projects for the state's 10 commercial airports](#) over the next two years. RDU would receive \$21 million in 2017-18 and about \$31 million in recurring funds starting in 2018-19.

The additional money for RDU would help pay for a [\\$305 million project](#) to replace the airport's longest runway, which is needed to accommodate and attract new trans-continental and international flights. The rest of the money for the runway could come from federal and state grants or airport revenue.

"It's clear that the state of North Carolina is serious about investing in aviation infrastructure," Kristie VanAuken, RDU's vice president of communications and community affairs, has said. "We are absolutely grateful for any new resources that come our way."

While the Senate budget [did not originally include](#) funding for the Charlotte Douglas International Airport, the compromise version proposes providing \$25 million during the 2018-19 fiscal year.

The House voted 77-40 on Wednesday to approve the compromise budget and is expected to take a final vote on Thursday. The Senate's final vote is also scheduled for Thursday, before the budget goes to Gov. Roy Cooper, who has been critical of it in general.

The money for airport projects would come from a short-term motor vehicle lease and rental tax, which generates nearly \$80 million per year. That money currently goes into the general fund, but the budget proposes shifting \$10 million from the general fund per year.

The eight other commercial airports in the state, including Piedmont Triad International Airport in Greensboro, Wilmington International Airport and Asheville Regional Airport, would also get more money under the proposal.

The amount of money included in the budget for other airports is based on the economic output of each airport, according to the budget. Here's what the airports would receive in each of the coming two fiscal years:

- Albert J. Ellis Airport in Onslow County, \$864,708.
- Asheville Regional Airport, \$2,026,331.
- Coastal Carolina Regional Airport in New Bern, \$653,162.
- Concord Regional Airport, \$586,901.
- Fayetteville Regional Airport, \$1,139,670.
- Piedmont Triad International Airport in Greensboro, \$7,123,082.
- Pitt-Greenville Airport in Greenville, \$377,070.
- Wilmington International Airport, \$5,946,945.

## CSX unveils new details about massive North Carolina terminal project

Triangle Business Journal By Lauren K. Ohnesorge June 14, 2017

Almost a year after Jacksonville, Florida-based transportation giant [CSX announced it was shifting its new terminal plans to Rocky Mount](#), a top exec says the project continues to be a priority.

That's in spite of a complete reorganization and C-suite shuffle at its headquarters.

"We are absolutely committed to moving forward," says [John Dillard](#), the South Carolina-based vice president of state relations for the Carolinas. He was in Rocky Mount for one of what he hopes will be several community updates on the project.

All property acquisition is complete, and if all goes as expected, permitting could be complete within six to nine months – making way for a groundbreaking in 2018.

This week, CSX unveiled specifics about the project, which will transfer massive cargo crates between trucks and trains for transport along the Southeast corridor. It's the first time the community is able to see "what the terminal will actually look like," he says – and that includes where, exactly, it will be located.

The Rocky Mount terminal will be the second such facility for CSX, which has a similar facility in Ohio.

"We have spent a lot of time thinking about things like buffers – both to manage storm water and vegetation, but also from an appearance standpoint," he says. The goal is for the terminal's 100-foot cranes to transfer massive cargo crates between trucks to trains with "minimal impact" on the surrounding community.



Community relations were what moved the plans from Johnston County to Edgecombe County in the first place. Initially, [CSX had planned the project for Selma](#)— but backed off after [resident outcry](#). Louis Renjel, former vice president of strategic infrastructure at CSX, had said that, as community support dissolved, [the firm was seriously considering locating the project outside of North Carolina](#).

The eastern North Carolina economic development community, however, [rallied for the project](#). Carolina Gateway Partnership, under the direction of its president and CEO, Norris Tolson, was able to secure land acquisition pledges for another stretch along Interstate 95, in nearby Rocky Mount, eventually luring CSX's commitment last July.

In Rocky Mount, community support has been unwavering, Dillard says.

"People have just been so supportive," he says. "They're anxious to see us get started."

In the meantime, operational strategy has changed at the home base in Jacksonville. CSX has been undertaking a comprehensive review of its operations. The company said in February it would be laying off 1,000 management-level employees. And Hunter Harrison, former CEO of Canadian Pacific, was named new CEO after a push by an activist investor group.

But through it all, the priorities haven't changed for Rocky Mount, Dillard says. CSX views the spot as ideal, not just because of the I-95 access.

"It's the proximity to the Triangle area," he says. "We feel it could have a lot of benefit for transportation and logistics service in the Triangle with an intermodal product ... It's an intermodal solution for those in the Triangle looking to take advantage of lower logistics costs."

He sees it as a "real catalyst for growth" in the state.

"Just by having those lower logistics costs and by having a facility like CSX in the region, it provides a lot of opportunities for shippers who are looking to expand their existing business or locate new businesses," he says.

It's already providing opportunities for vendors. Dillard says CSX is currently accepting supplier applications on its website.

## Top 5 international destinations on RDU's wish list

Triangle Business Journal By Lauren K. Ohnesorge June 23, 2017

Now that Raleigh-Durham International Airport [has secured a nonstop flight to San Juan, Puerto Rico](#), airport officials are already eyeing new destinations.

Both domestic and international routes are on staff's radar. But securing new service can take years of lobbying, says [Kristie Van Auken](#), the vice president of communications and community affairs who heads the team responsible for securing new carriers and routes.

Frankfurt, Germany, is the No. 5 unserved international market at Raleigh-Durham... more

"For us, it's very much about the relationships with the airlines and understanding the business," she says. "The more we know about how they make decisions and what they care about, the more successful we are."

Read: [Budget airlines eye RDU opportunities](#)

Her team is on the phone "daily" with airlines about new potential destinations for RDU, educating them on the region's strengths, she says.

That tutelage can start as simply as staff forwarding a news article about a new company coming to the Triangle. And – as with last year’s Delta Air Lines service to Paris – it can require a community effort.

Allegiant’s San Juan, Puerto Rico, flight service was RDU’s biggest win in recent weeks. And it already has competition, as Delta Air Lines just announced it’s adding six trips to the city over the pique holiday season on Saturdays.

**Poll:** [Which international destination should RDU focus on next?](#)

“When we start planting the seeds on various markets, as one thing becomes successful, success begets success,” she says, adding that if RDU is successful with Allegiant’s flight, it could add additional Caribbean flight service in the future. At the top of that wish list is [Punta Cana](#), Dominican Republic, which is currently RDU’s top unserved international market.

With San Juan off the list, the top five unserved domestic markets, in terms of traffic, are now San Diego; Kansas City; Portland, Oregon; San Jose, California; and San Antonio.

RDU, which doesn’t disclose details of active conversations about air service expansion, [confirms discussions are ongoing with potential carrier partners for San Diego](#) and other unserved routes. San Diego, like RDU, is a non-hub airport, though it is a focus city for two RDU carriers: Southwest Airlines and Alaska Air. Kansas City, too, [continues its place near the top of the list](#).

Incentives also play into recruiting destinations on the list – but they depend on the number of flights offered.

Allegiant, in addition to landing fee abatements, will receive about \$20,000 in marketing assistance from RDU for its San Juan route, part of a newly approved air service incentives program.

When it comes to farther geographies – take China, repeatedly stated as a focus destination by RDU CEO Michael Landguth – it’s also about the infrastructure needed to support the huge airplanes required for the nonstop trek.

**Read:** [The case for a China flight out of RDU](#)

As the airport’s sole international runway is reaching its end of life, RDU has been trying to secure state and federal dollars to replace it, something Landguth says is “critical” in securing additional international service.

RDU received some good news Wednesday. The House and Senate’s compromise budget directs more than \$50 million over the next two years to replace that runway. In the 2017-18 fiscal year, RDU would receive \$21 million, with about \$31 million in recurring funds starting in the 2018-19 year.

## Boomers ‘age’ census stats

Herald-Sun By the Editorial Board June 26, 2017

New estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau offer North Carolina leaders a challenge in terms of planning the state’s future, whether that means accommodating the needs of the increasingly older population or helping the different ethnic groups who are making the state more diverse find an easier way to immerse themselves in North Carolina culture while bringing characteristics of their own backgrounds to a more diverse state.

Census statistics ought to be closely watched by political leaders, not just for their own self-interest but to help map the state’s future.

The aging of the population is one example.

[Census: North Carolina's population getting older, more diverse]

Some 10,000 baby boomers turn 65 every day, and that generation will continue to build the Medicare-eligible age group for a number of years. That's not to say that the Triangle, for example, has "turned gray." The median age in Wake County is 36 – young by any standard (except, perhaps that of millennials) but up from 34.2, according to the census. And that number is virtually certain to grow in coming years because the boomers are loosely defined as those born between 1946 and 1964.

Wake's not alone. The median age in Durham County increased from 33.5 to 35.2. The median age in Orange County increased from 33.1 to 34.2.

There are challenges there: The boomers will need facilities to meet aging and health care needs, transportation options (as they quit driving), both individual and group living arrangement opportunities and help in making their money last longer than many ever thought they'd have to make it last.

Also challenging but exciting in the new census numbers are statistics showing much more diversity in race and ethnicity: Whites are still the largest race, at 63.5 percent in 2016, but that's down from 65.3 percent in 2010. Blacks accounted for about 21.3 percent.

Interestingly, Hispanics grew in number, by 127,000 statewide since 2010, and now are nearing 1 million in population. They are in the highest percentages in rural, agriculture areas.

Asians also grew by big numbers in some spots, notably by 44 percent in Wake County.

Numbers are just numbers until they're put into use by policy makers. And these numbers should be useful indeed as the Triangle copes with housing needs for all generations (Durham has a number of millennials working at high-tech companies, for example). The county also can use the numbers to make it a priority to generate ideas about coping with the needs of older citizens. Consider, for example, the push for more transportation options. Durham and Orange counties have some mass transit with plans for more, but the aging of the population – and get this, also the youth of the population, including people moving from elsewhere who prefer not to have cars – underlines the need for more options.

The younger folks moving in also want more bike trails and bike lanes. The folks getting older are drawn in part by the state-of-the-art health care facilities. They will need more transitional housing – something that seems to have been lost in the boom-boom-boom of huge homes and gentrification of old neighborhoods.

The various pressures make it necessary for local governments to focus more on affordable housing, on mass transit, even on health care and assistance for the elderly in terms of getting around or accessing meals.

The numbers bring challenges. And, we hope, opportunity.

#### **NOTABLE NUMBERS**

932,000 – Census estimate of Hispanic population in North Carolina, up by 127,000 since 2010

10,000 – Number of baby boomers who turn 65 every day

30.8 – Median age in Utah, the "youngest" state

44.6 – Median age in Maine, the "oldest" state

52.9 – Median age in Brunswick County, along the N.C. coast (a popular retirement area)

## Cap on light rail funding remains in final NC budget

The News and Observer By Colin Campbell June 26, 2017

For the second year in a row, the N.C. House has been unsuccessful in its efforts to remove a state funding cap that significantly reduces funding for the Durham-Chapel Hill light rail project.

Starting in 2015, state funding for light rail projects has been capped at \$500,000, a move that effectively canceled the state's commitment to provide \$138 million for the \$2.5 billion line connecting Durham and Chapel Hill.

The cap would have been eliminated under the House's budget proposal, but the Senate didn't want to make the change, and the final budget leaves the cap intact for another year. A similar budget disagreement in 2016 had the same result.

N.C. Transportation Secretary Jim Trogdon criticized the decision in a letter released by the governor's office on Monday.

"A light rail system for this region would boost business development and recruitment, and also assist commuters along this growing corridor," Trogdon wrote. "A provision to remove the cap was present in the House version, but removed in conference – a missed opportunity for the entire state to increase our competitiveness with peer southeastern and growing states nationally."

Planning for the project continues despite the lower amount of state funding. As of January, backers of the project still hoped to begin construction in 2020.

## North Carolina's rural roads among deadliest in country, study says

WRAL.com By Evan Matsumoto June 28, 2017

RALEIGH, N.C. — North Carolina has some of the deadliest rural roads in the country, according to a national study.

The study by TRIP, a national transportation research group, found the Tar Heel State had 855 deaths on rural roads in 2015, which is the latest year of data. The number ranked North Carolina third in the country.

Only Texas and California tallied more rural-road deaths, with 1,259 and 1,219, respectively.

TRIP said fatal crashes on rural roads were more common than in urban areas because there are fewer roadway safety features, longer emergency response times and higher speed limits. Narrow lanes and two-lane roads also contributed to the problem.

South Carolina counted 607 deaths on rural roads, ranking the state at No. 4. Pennsylvania ranked fifth with 565 deaths.

Top 25 states with most fatal crashes on non-interstate, rural roads in 2015:

- 1 Texas 1,259
- 2 California 1,219
- 3 North Carolina 855
- 4 South Carolina 607
- 5 Pennsylvania 565
- 6 Kentucky 542
- 7 Michigan 528

8 Mississippi 524  
9 Georgia 505  
10 Indiana 467  
11 Ohio 467  
12 Missouri 449  
13 Alabama 436  
14 Tennessee 424  
15 Virginia 422  
16 New York 416  
17 Illinois 372  
18 Florida 360  
19 Oklahoma 354  
20 Wisconsin 340  
21 Arkansas 333  
22 Louisiana 316  
23 Oregon 283  
24 Washington 262  
25 Minnesota 260

## **Go, go electric buses in Triangle? Agencies team up for fed grant**

WRAL.com TechWire By Rick Smith, WRAL TechWire Editor June 29, 2017

RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK, N.C. — The go-go agencies in the Triangle are teaming up with Chapel Hill in a bid for federal funding to put electric buses on the region's roadways.

GoTriangle, GoRaleigh, GoCary and Chapel Hill Transit say they want the funding to equip their fleets with two buses each.

Some \$55 million in grant money is available, and the Triangle transit folks want their share.

### **Cheap? Not hardly**

But these electric wonders aren't cheap.

The partners note the 40-foot buses made by Proterra run close to \$1 million each.

Then there are charging stations.

And other equipment.

So it's easy to see why the Go folks want - and need - fed funds to help put cleaner buses in service. However, there is a return on investment beyond less fumes.

"That's about twice the cost of a diesel bus, but electric buses produce no tailpipe emissions and are less expensive to operate, traveling 21.4 mpg-equivalent at 19 cents a mile. By comparison, a diesel bus gets 3.86 mpg at 84 cents per mile," the Go team says.

"That means the operating cost over the lifespan of an electric bus is \$250,000 to \$400,000 less than a diesel bus."

If the grant is won, the Go team hopes to have the electric buses moving by early 2019.

"We have listened to those who took the time to comment on transit plans and are thrilled to work together as one region to seek the means to deploy electric buses in both local and regional service," said Jeff Mann, GoTriangle's general manager, in announcing the grant push. "We want to make sure we're using the best tools in the toolshed to connect the people and places of our growing region."

The grants are available through what is called the "Low or No Emission Competitive Grant Program."

### **Partnering up**

And the Go team has lined up plenty of support, including Duke Energy.

Local officials sending letters of support came from: Wake County, Durham County, Orange County, Raleigh, Cary, Chapel Hill, Carrboro, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the NC Department of Transportation, Triangle J Council of Governments, NC Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization, Southern Environmental Law Center, Regional Transportation Alliance, Research Triangle Cleantech Cluster, NC Clean Energy Technology Center and WakeUP Wake County.

Wow. Imagine following an electric bus vs. the alternative.

Yes, a bus is a bus is a bus - but electric is cleaner (assuming Duke keeps moving to provide more environmentally friendly power) and (most likely) a heck of a lot quieter.

Dare The Skinny say it?

Go, Triangle.

## **NCDOT wants state's help with public transportation plan**

Triangle Business Journal By Lauren K. Ohnesorge July 3, 2017

As North Carolina develops its public transportation blueprint – known as the Public Transportation Strategic Plan – it's looking for your input.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation is asking state residents to take part in an online survey to let their top priorities for public transportation services be known.

**Read:** [The Wi-Fi equipped electric buses that could be coming to Raleigh](#)

Debbie Collins, public transportation division director at NCDOT, said it's the first time the state has utilized the survey system for a public transportation plan.

The responses will culminate into just one of the ways the state will develop its transportation priorities. NCDOT also conducts a series of public meetings, with the next string happening in October. Additionally, interviews with stakeholders contribute to that planning process, she said.

"It helps us define partnerships we need to focus on, it helps us find programs it helps us find strategies," she said.

According to NCDOT, the plan under development – to be called the Public Transportation Statewide Strategic Plan – is intended to build on what partnerships between the department and local governments and regional authorities have already been doing. It's intended to reinvigorate state and local transit partnerships and is being developed cooperatively with communities across the state, as well as transit users, providers and nonprofits.

If all goes well, it should be ready for presentation to the public in spring of 2018, Collins said.

## Driver-less cars in N.C.? New regulations just part of the story

Triangle Business Journal By Lauren K. Ohnesorge July 3, 2017

North Carolina's first rules regulating driver-less car technology are awaiting Gov. Roy Cooper's signature, having secured vast bipartisan support in the General Assembly.

The regulations iron out requirements for one day having your car drive you to work – such as having a registration card in the vehicle (physically or electronically) and an automobile's owner being named responsible for moving violations the vehicle performs, even if you're not at the wheel.

**Read:** Duke prof: Driver-less vehicles are coming

Even without the regulations, the state is poised to tackle the autonomous vehicle industry – particularly from a research standpoint.

In January, the North Carolina Turnpike Authority [was selected by the U.S. Department of Transportation for one of 10 test locations for autonomous vehicle technology](#).

And the Triangle Expressway, a highway that sees nearly 50,000 cars on an average weekday, was tapped for the testing ground.

Beau Memory, executive director for the NCTA, says details of what the program will mean are still scarce.

"We've been largely focused on making sure we're ready to test as those opportunities come up," he said, noting that, so far, it's primarily just involved a plethora of conversations with partners on the project such as UNC-Charlotte's Center for Transportation Policy Studies and Duke University's Humans and Autonomy Lab.

His agency is working with USDOT to develop what's called a memorandum of agreement, required to start the project.

"As you might imagine in government, it's been a slow process," he said.

But hints of future opportunities are already emerging. Representatives from the trucking industry have contacted his team "about having a truck platooning trial on the Expressway," he said.

He declines to give details, citing confidentiality. And he says it's too early to know if such a pilot could translate to local jobs.

But he does say it's encouraging – and hopefully the first of multiple inquiries.

"We're excited to be approached," he said.

Of the newly-passed regulations, Memory says his team has been "really appreciative" of how the General Assembly worked with both his department and the industry to craft the rules. And he's optimistic they'll lead to opportunities.

David Strickland, general counsel for the Self-Driving Coalition for Safer Streets, which represents Ford, Volvo Cars, Uber, Lyft and Waymo on self-driving policy issues, released a statement Thursday on the bill.

"After expressing concerns about how HB 469 would impact testing and deployment of fully self-driving vehicles in North Carolina, the Self-Driving Coalition for Safer Streets appreciates the opportunity to have worked successfully with lawmakers to address and clarify these issues."

The bill was presented to Cooper Wednesday.

## What's on the horizon for new flights and destinations from RDU?

The Herald-Sun By Kathryn Trogdon July 5, 2017

MORRISVILLE – In the last year, five airlines have added new flights from Raleigh-Durham International Airport, including trips to four new nonstop destinations – Paris, New Orleans, Austin, Texas, and soon San Juan, Puerto Rico.

RDU officials want to use this momentum to attract more airlines and flights to the Triangle, setting new and ambitious goals for the airport's future.

Those goals include direct connections to places like San Diego, Kansas City, Mo., South America and China, which would add to RDU's list of 48 nonstop destinations once Allegiant Air kicks off its twice-weekly flights to San Juan in December.

"All of the routes that we've seen out of RDU have done pretty well," said Kristen Schilling-Gonzales, Allegiant's director of planning. "We've seen some pretty strong bookings most recently on the San Juan flight."

While RDU officials have been working to attract a nonstop flight to San Juan for a couple years, a new incentive program the Airport Authority put in place in April helped seal the deal. Allegiant will receive marketing assistance and waived landing fees for one year.

"Quite honestly, the investment to test a new route is pretty high," Schilling-Gonzales said. "So we're not looking at being incentivized for years to come. It's generally what can we do to offset the initial start-up costs."

Airlines that add international flights and new airlines that come to RDU also can benefit from the incentives program.

In March, Virgin America announced it would come to RDU as the airport's 10th carrier when it begins flights to San Francisco in October. Now the airport is eyeing other airlines, particularly low-cost carriers such as Spirit Airlines.

"The incentives are like the cherry on top," said Kristie VanAuken, RDU's vice president of communications and community affairs. "This doesn't work unless the business case is solid, so that is the number one thing. That is where we spend 95 percent of our energy, because we want the service to be successful for the long haul."

Attracting new flights starts with relationships with airlines and "building the business case around each new market," VanAuken said. But making the case takes time.

Austin, Texas, was RDU's top market in terms of passenger demand without a nonstop flight until Delta Air Lines began flying there in March. VanAuken said it took four years of discussions with airlines to make that connection a reality.

Now San Diego is the top unserved destination, followed by Kansas City, Portland, Ore., San Jose, Calif., and San Antonio. Longer flights like San Diego are tougher to get because they require a larger airplane, and airlines must dedicate more time to the flights.

Attracting a new flight involves understanding the priorities of different airlines. For example, Allegiant goes for vacation spots or other places that draw leisure travelers. The airline also aims for destinations that are more than eight hours away by car but, in most cases, are close enough to allow the same plane to make a round trip each day.

Puerto Rico is Allegiant's first destination from RDU that will deviate from this round-trip practice.



Delta's priority is to offer flights to the most destinations around the world on larger aircraft and to rely on partners to get passengers to smaller markets. For example, someone flying from the United States to China would land in either Beijing or Shanghai and then fly with a partner airline to any other Chinese destination.

It can take years for airports to get a new flight and even longer to attract international flights, like RDU's long-sought-after direct route to China.

"It's the brass ring," VanAuken said. "We feel like this community, the Triangle region, can support a nonstop to China and so what we want to do is start building the business case around that."

RDU has been working on making the case for two years. Officials have spoken with corporations in the region that might be interested in a direct flight to China for their employees.

But it might be a tough sell. Delta, for example, only offers direct flights to China from three American cities – Detroit, Seattle and Los Angeles.

"The number one driver of Delta adding a new route is going to be passenger demand and the ability to generate revenue for the airline," Delta spokesman Anthony Black said. "If that doesn't happen, all other things are irrelevant."

## **GoTriangle Will Soon Learn Whether Light Rail Will Move to the Next Stage of the Grant Application Process**

Indyweek.com By Sarah Willets July 5, 2017

Within a few weeks, GoTriangle will learn whether the \$3.3 billion Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit project will be allowed to move to the next phase of a federal grant application process.

If the Federal Transit Administration gives the OK, the DOLRT can move from the project development phase to the engineering and design phase. GoTriangle communications director Mike Charbonneau says some design work has already been done in terms of environmental assessment, mapping the 17.7-mile route, and initial engineering work.

"If the project is approved in the final federal budget and moved into construction in 2020, the project in its entirety is eligible for a fifty percent match," Charbonneau says. "The federal match is critical to get the project done. As important as light rail is to Durham and Orange counties, clearly it couldn't be built without this funding."

There's the catch: although GoTriangle remains optimistic about the project's viability, there's a chance the federal funding will fall through.

A budget proposal put forth by President Trump for fiscal year 2018 would only award grants to projects with existing FTA agreements. This one doesn't meet that criteria. Without federal funding, everything is on hold.

"Nationally and locally, everyone is watching but also feeling confident that the federal discussion and budget processes will recognize the value of transit," Charbonneau says.

According to the FTA, moving into the project development phase is not a guarantee that the project will ultimately be funded.

"The president's budget proposal includes no funding for new [Capital Investment Grant] projects, and thus project sponsors that do not yet have construction grant agreements acknowledge they are undertaking additional work at their own risk which may not receive CIG funding," an FTA spokesperson said in an email to the INDY.

If all goes as planned, construction is expected to be complete in 2028, with the system becoming operational in 2029.

*This article appeared in print with the headline "The \$3B Question"*

## **East End Connector progress prompts closures on N.C. 147, 98 in Durham**

Triangle Business Journal By Lauren K. Ohnesorge July 7, 2017

The East End Connector in Durham is on track, according to N.C. Department of Transportation officials.

Starting Monday, temporary nighttime closures are coming to N.C. 147 and N.C. 98 – an evening inconvenience that signals progress on the Durham project. Crews will work on the structure that will connect 147 South to the East End Connector, ultimately connecting to Highway 70. Officials hope the addition will improve congestion on the heavily congested corridor.

**Read:** By the numbers: The massive East End Connector project

In an interview, Maira Ibarra, assistant resident engineer with NCDOT, says about half of the work targeted for 147 is already complete. The big task for night crews is setting the remaining four bridge girders – and they're massive, she says.

"It takes more than one night to erect them," she explains.

Only one span remains, the section over 147 North. As of the end of June, NCDOT had completed about 48 percent of the project. It's on track for completion in December of 2019, Ibarra says.

Officials have said they hope the East End Connector will promote economic development in areas along the I-85 corridor by improving access to Durham and Research Triangle Park.

The \$142 million project began with property acquisition in 2012 – but it was first introduced in the state more than five decades ago. In 2003, the East End Connector was added to a list of projects eligible for funding under the North Carolina Highway Trust Fund. And in 2005, officials began a re-evaluation study, with an environmental assessment finally signed in 2009. A groundbreaking for the 3.9-mile connector finally happened in 2015.

NCDOT is contracting with New York-based Dragados USA to build the East End Connector.

Starting Monday, 147 North (also called the Durham Freeway) between Ellis Road (Exit 8) and Briggs Avenue (Exit 10) will be closed nightly from 10 p.m. until 5 a.m. through Thursday, July 13. A signed detour will divert drivers along T.W. Alexander Drive and Alston Avenue to get back on northbound N.C. 147. N.C. 98 (Holloway Street) will also be closed in both directions between Southerland Street and Herbert Street during those same times.

## **Outdoor enthusiasts push for trails as RDU unveils \$2.7B plan for airport upgrades**

The News and Observer By Kathryn Trogdon July 8, 2017

MORRISVILLE – Raleigh-Durham International Airport now has a plan for how it will pay for \$2.7 billion in major projects, including the replacement of its longest runway, in the next 25 years.

About \$1.8 billion is needed for upgrading the terminals and roadways, as well as building a consolidated rental car facility and adding parking, according to the airport. More than \$900 million is needed to maintain infrastructure, including runways and taxiways.

The projects would be paid for mostly through airport revenues and financing, and about \$192.7 million in federal and state funds. Roughly \$281 million would come from a \$4.50 customer facility charge RDU collects from each passenger who boards a plane there.

In its recent budget, the North Carolina legislature [committed](#) to giving RDU \$21 million in the 2017-18 fiscal year and about \$31 million in recurring funds starting in 2018-19.

The RDU Airport Authority will host a public open house from noon to 6 p.m. Monday to answer questions about financing and funding sources for the projects listed in its 25-year master plan. There will be no formal presentation at the open house, and visitors are invited to stop by.

Local hikers, cyclists and other outdoor enthusiasts have voiced concerns about the airport's plan for [part of its property](#), particularly the forested areas closest to Lake Crabtree County Park and William B. Umstead State Park.

Vision2040, the master plan the airport authority approved last October which is under review by the Federal Aviation Administration, lays out potential development of the airport's core, as well as surrounding land, including a possible hotel or office park, quarry and parking.

Developing airport land could help pay for the expenses RDU expects to face in the coming years as it replaces runways and taxiways, builds a consolidated rental car facility and makes other improvements. Airport officials expect to have to rebuild the longest runway in the next three to five years.

Kristie VanAuken, RDU's vice president of communications and community affairs, has said the airport's main focus is rebuilding a runway and making it possible to add up to 23 new gates as needed in the next 25 years.

Without a new runway, the airport would be left with only one commercial runway, and at 7,500 feet, it isn't long enough to accommodate trans-Atlantic or trans-continental flights. A new runway also would be needed if the airport hopes to attract a flight to [China](#).

Members of groups like Triangle Off-Road Cyclists and The Umstead Coalition say they don't take issue with proposed projects within the airport's core. They are most concerned about a potential quarry that is listed as a possible use for land south of Umstead.

The RDU Forest Coalition is pushing for the preservation of more than 600 acres of land between the Lake Crabtree and Umstead parks. They want the area to be used for an expansive system of trails and supporting businesses.

More than 7,000 [supporters](#) have signed an [online petition](#) asking the airport authority to preserve the forested land and existing recreational trails to be used for the project.

The Umstead Coalition sent out an email blast Thursday encouraging outdoor enthusiasts to attend Monday's open house in support of this vision for more than 50 miles of trails with nearby brew pubs, outdoor stores, bike rentals, rope courses, zip lines and more.

"We are anxious to see what their financial story is, but we remain very concerned about the proposed, controversial quarry," Jean Spooner, chair of The Umstead Coalition, said in an interview. "We still want to work with the RDU Airport Authority on alternative evaluations for that land."

RDU spokesman Andrew Sawyer said only the funding of major airport projects will be discussed at the open house, not the future use of land.

"We are not discussing land use at this meeting so that's not going to be a part of the discussion," he said.

## Raleigh and 2 other NC cities among top 10 best cities to drive in

The News and Observer By Abbie Bennett July 11, 2017

RALEIGH – Raleigh, Greensboro and Winston-Salem are among the top 10 best cities to drive in.

Using data for gas prices, annual hours of traffic delays, auto-repair shops per capita, repair costs, parking rates, accident likelihood and more, personal finance website [WalletHub](#) studied the 100 largest cities in America to determine which ones are the least painful to drive in.

Greensboro was the top-ranked North Carolina city, coming in at No. 3, followed by Winston-Salem at No. 7 and Raleigh at No. 10.

Greensboro was ranked first in the U.S. for lowest annual hours spent in congestion per driver. It also came in at No. 3 for lowest auto-maintenance costs.

Winston-Salem was No. 1 in the country for lowest parking rates. Greensboro was No. 4.

Raleigh didn't make the top 5 for any individual ranking.

The top 10 in order were: Corpus Christi, Texas; Gilbert, AZ; Greensboro; Mesa, AZ; El Paso, Texas; Laredo, Texas; Winston-Salem; Plano, Texas; Scottsdale, AZ; and Raleigh.

To see the full ranking, go to [wallethub.com/edu/best-worst-cities-to-drive-in/13964](http://wallethub.com/edu/best-worst-cities-to-drive-in/13964).

## NCDOT: \$32.3M highway lighting revamp will pay for itself in energy savings

Triangle Business Journal By Lauren K. Ohnesorge July 12, 2017

The state of North Carolina wants to replace existing highway lighting statewide with energy-efficient LEDs. It's part of a massive project with a \$32.3 million price tag.

But officials insist it will pay for itself in energy savings.

A guaranteed energy savings contract with Minnesota's Trane US Inc. calls for replacing the lights as well as installing a new monitoring and control system. Brady Trane Services, the firm's North Carolina affiliate, has been working directly with NCDOT since being awarded a project in 2014, says NCDOT spokesman Steve Abbott.

The initial project was to identify scopes of work for energy conservation measures across NCDOT's 14 divisions. A guaranteed energy savings contract can only be entered into when the energy savings resulted from the performance of the contract is expected to equal or exceed the cost of the contract.

In this case, the new contract covers 15 years, with a total guaranteed savings of about \$51.4 million in electrical and operational costs, Abbott says. NCDOT expects the maintenance of both the upgraded roadway lights and the monitoring system to be paid for entirely from project savings.

If all goes as planned, work can start later this month, with the construction targeted for completion in November 2018.

After just the first year of construction, NCDOT projects the total savings to exceed \$3.3 million for the state. As those efficiencies are being realized, initial costs will be financed through Bank of America under a 2.1 percent interest rate.

In total, the Trane contract breaks down to about 10,689 new roadway light fixtures at 353 locations, including sections of I-40 and I-85 in Durham and stretches of I-40, I-440 and 540 in Wake County.

Additionally, it means 12,128 upgraded fixtures in 683 buildings, from visitor centers to rest areas to NCDOT maintenance facilities. The contract also calls for a monitoring and control system to keep tabs on both the savings and maintenance needs over the next 15 years.

The contractor has tapped both General Electric and Holophane as the LED providers.

According to a proposal within the Council of State agenda, about 120 workers, including engineers, managers and factory workers, will be employed over the 16-month construction period.

The Division of Environmental Assistance and Customer Service in the Department of Environmental Quality asked the Council of State to approve NCDOT's contract with Trane, as well as the financial contract with Bank of America at its meeting Tuesday. Requests were approved, according to NCDOT.

## **Durham-Orange light rail one step closer to \$1.2B in federal dollars**

The Herald-Sun By Tammy Grubb July 28, 2017

DURHAM – Questions about whether federal budget discussions would halt the \$2.47 billion Durham-Orange light-rail transit project were answered Friday.

The Federal Transit Administration approved moving the 17.7-mile light-rail project into the engineering phase — the last design piece before learning whether the counties could get 50 percent of the project's funding by 2020 from the federal government.

"Today marks an important step forward for the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit project and our region's transportation future," said U.S. Rep. David Price, D-N.C. "I will continue working to ensure the federal government remains an active partner in this effort."

The final federal decision also depends on the project getting up to 10 percent of its funding from the state and the remaining 40 percent from regional partners — roughly \$890 million, plus interest on short- and long-term debt. GoTriangle plans to repay the debt through 2062.

The local split is estimated at \$316.9 million for Orange County taxpayers and \$1.5 billion for Durham County taxpayers, largely from vehicle registration fees, car rental fees and a half-cent transit sales tax. Officials also are working with the public-private Funding and Community Collaborative to secure land and cash donations.

GoTriangle announced the FTA's decision in a news release Friday. The project was submitted for consideration in April, but federal budget discussions this spring cast doubt on whether the money in the FTA's New Starts and Small Starts programs would be there for major transit projects nationwide.

"FTA has determined that GoTriangle has the technical capacity and capability to effectively manage the Engineering phase of the Project," the FTA letter stated.

However, the FTA also reiterated that President Donald Trump's 2017-18 budget doesn't include any new money for large transit projects, "and thus GoTriangle acknowledges that it is undertaking additional work at its own risk which may not receive any Capital Investments Grant funding."

The letter rates the project as “medium” — the minimum rating on a five-point scale required to enter engineering. FTA officials want more information about what would happen if there are unexpected cost overruns or funding shortfalls, financing costs through 2032, and other risks to the project’s cost and schedule.

GoTriangle officials noted the project got favorable ratings in three major areas — local financial commitment, project justification and engineering readiness. The project was measured for its mobility improvements, environmental benefits, congestion relief, economic development effects, land use and cost-effectiveness.

“We would like to sincerely thank the Federal Transit Administration for its support and collaboration on the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit project,” GoTriangle General Manager Jeff Mann said. “We are pleased to continue working closely with our local, state and federal partners to deliver Durham and Orange counties’ plans for enhanced bus service, commuter rail, a new Amtrak station in Hillsborough and the light-rail project.”

GoTriangle officials will discuss the project’s rating and FTA requests next week and what those mean for the project, spokesman Juan Carlos Erickson said. The \$70 million engineering contract was approved this spring and the work is in progress.

Meanwhile, the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization plans to resubmit the project for North Carolina Department of Transportation funding. The project remains on track for construction in 2020, with service beginning in 2028, GoTriangle officials said.

If built, the light-rail line would link UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill with Duke and N.C. Central universities in Durham. The plan includes 18 stations connecting residents to education, work, home and retail centers.

Durham County Commissioner Ellen Reckhow called Friday’s decision great news for Durham and Orange counties.

“The light rail will give our communities an option for a congestion-free commute with predictable travel times and offer direct connections to three hospitals, three major universities and job centers,” said Reckhow, also a GoTriangle board member. “It also will help create thousands of new jobs for our region.”

## **GoTriangle says ‘medium’ is good news for Durham-Orange light rail line**

The Herald-Sun By Tammy Grubb July 31, 2017

CHAPEL HILL – GoTriangle officials say a “medium” rating from the federal government is a good sign for the \$2.47 billion Durham-Orange Light-Rail Transit project.

The Federal Transit Administration rating, announced Friday, is the minimum required to move the 17.7-mile project into the engineering phase. The rail line would connect UNC in Chapel Hill with Duke and N.C. Central University in Durham, and points in between.

The FTA bases its ratings on local money dedicated to the project, whether a project is ready for engineering, and how it meets other criteria, like congestion relief.

“Our overall rating is good news and keeps Durham and Orange County’s project on track to be eligible for more than \$1 billion in federal investment,” Jeff Mann, GoTriangle general manager, said in an email.

FTA documents released Monday rated GoTriangle “medium-high” on current capital and operations, and “medium” for having 39 percent of the local and state money committed at this point.

[Click here to read the letter from the Federal Transit Administration.](#)

[Click here to read the financial rating assigned to the DOLRT project.](#)

The FTA also rated GoTriangle's financial estimates "medium-low," noting that cost projections and expected revenues from a half-cent transit sales tax are reasonable. However, it questioned the "optimistic" outlook for vehicle registration and car rental fee revenues, the anticipated growth in light-rail operating costs, and fare revenue projections.

FTA officials do not comment publicly about proposed projects but said in an email that "project ratings are 'point in time' evaluations, and as projects advance through the program, costs and benefits may change." All projects get a new rating before grants are awarded.

Although most transit projects since 2010 were rated "medium-high" when they got federal grants, Charlotte's LYNX Blue Line and Blue Line Extension projects were rated "medium" when approved for engineering. Both maintained "medium" ratings for project criteria, but their financial plans were upgraded to "medium high" prior to being funded in 2002 and 2012.

GoTriangle's light-rail project manager Danny Rogers also led Charlotte's light-rail extension project.

"We're very much in the same boat as we were in Charlotte when we did that (project)," Rogers said. "The names of the phases are a little different, but it's still the same thing."

Looking ahead

#### **Q. What happens next?**

An FTA-appointed project management oversight contractor and GoTriangle will complete the project's design, schedule and costs, and confirm that state and local funding is available. A formal risk assessment could be done over the next six months.

If all goes as planned, GoTriangle could submit the project for a federal budget recommendation in 2018, and it could be approved for a \$1.2 billion from the 2019-2020 federal budget. The money would be paid in \$100 million installments over the next 12 years.

#### **Q. What could the state pay?**

The state legislature has capped light-rail project funding at 10 percent of the total cost, or \$237 million. However, the final amount of state funding will depend on how the N.C. Department of Transportation scores the project.

#### **Q. How will we pay the local share?**

Orange and Durham counties will split 40 percent of the project's final cost, estimated at \$990 million. Plans for short- and long-term debt could generate \$913 million more in interest, repayable through 2062.

Orange County's share would be roughly \$332 million, while Durham County would pay about \$1.5 billion. That money will come from a half-cent transit sales tax and vehicle registration and car rental fees. The agreement between GoTriangle and the counties states no other tax dollars have to be used for the project.

A public-private Funding and Community Collaborative is seeking cash and land donations that could cover \$100 million of the local construction cost.

#### **Q. What is the financial risk?**

GoTriangle has spent roughly \$33 million so far, primarily for a required environmental impact study. Another \$70 million is being spent on engineering. The FTA could reimburse half of the money if the project gets a federal grant.

#### **Q. What happens if there are cost overruns, or the local, state or federal money isn't there?**

The light-rail project budgets an amount equal to roughly 30 percent of the construction cost for unexpected expenses. The FTA's project management oversight contractor monitors the project and changes in the cost estimates, helping GoTriangle find ways to cut costs if necessary.

The project probably won't be built without the anticipated state and federal money, GoTriangle has said.

**Q. How will the federal budget affect the light-rail plan?**

The Congressional Research Service reports a lot of debate at the federal level about whether the benefits of Capital Investment Grant projects, such as light rail, justify the cost. However, congressional committees recently rejected President Donald Trump's budget plan that phases out the CIG program.

The Senate and House appropriations committees recently approved draft Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies funding bills that direct the FTA to continue moving projects through the CIG funding pipeline.

The Senate bill includes \$2.13 billion for CIG projects next year – \$380 million more than the House version but \$168 million less than now authorized.

The full House and Senate still must approve the committee recommendations, and Trump has to sign the final bill. Negotiations could begin in September.